

TOWN OF STANDARD SHAFT
.5 miles North of SR819
Standard Shaft
Westmoreland County
Pennsylvania

HAER No. PA-292

HAER
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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Engineering Record
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
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HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

TOWN OF STANDARD SHAFT

HAER No. PA-292

Location: .5 miles N. of Route 819, Mt. Pleasant Township, Westmoreland County, Pennsylvania

Date of Construction: 1878, 1883

Builder: unknown

Present Owner: residents

Present Use: housing

Significance: Built to house workers at one of the largest coal and coke works in the United States, houses are of construction typical of coal and coke communities throughout western Pennsylvania. Many retain original clapboard siding and double outhouses in rear.

Project Information: In February, 1987, the Historic American Engineering Record (HAER) and the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) began a multi-year historical and architectural documentation project in southwestern Pennsylvania. Carried out in conjunction with America's Industrial Heritage Project (AIHP), HAER undertook a comprehensive inventory of Westmoreland County to identify the region's surviving historic engineering works and industrial resources.

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DESCRIPTION: The town of Standard Shaft retains about forty company-built houses. The dwellings are two-story wood-frame double houses similar to those found in the region's coal towns. Some retain their original clapboard siding. Each has a gable roof with brick chimneys. The buildings rest on rubble stone foundations. A number of houses retain their original double outhouses in the back yards. Most of the double houses have been converted into single-family houses and most have had metal or asphaltic siding applied over the original clapboard siding. Other modifications include the enclosure of porches, the addition of rooms, and the installation of new windows. There was no company store at Standard Shaft. Workers living here used the Union Supply company store at Standard (see entry below).

Of the several mine buildings, and the headframe and tippie at Standard Shaft, only the Machine Shop and Generator/Lamp House survive. Built ca. 1886, the Machine Shop is a one-story common-bond red-brick building and measures approximately 30' x 12'. It has a gable roof covered with asphalt and is supported by riveted steel roof trusses. The building features arched window openings with brick keystones; the windows have been infilled with brick. It also has a large sliding metal door (not contemporary with the building's use as a lamp house) at its gable end, and two brick chimneys. The building rests on a stone foundation. The Generator/Lamp House is a one-story common-bond red-brick building with a hipped roof. It measures approximately 45' x 15'. The building was probably built about 1910. A number of alterations have been made including the infilling of the windows with brick and the installation of sliding and overhead garage doors. The building rests on a stone foundation. Both buildings are currently used for storage, and none of the original machinery is extant.

HISTORY: When the H. C. Frick Coke Company completed construction of its Standard Shaft No. 2 mine in 1886 it was one of the largest mine and coke works in United States. The company initially sunk the shaft to a depth of 306' and had two cageways, one for raising and lowering men and machines into the mine, and the other for hoisting coal from the underground workings. The Vulcan Iron Works of Wilkes Barre, Pennsylvania, manufacturers of engines used at many late-nineteenth century collieries throughout western Pennsylvania, built the winding engines for the Standard No. 2 mine. The headframe was of steel construction, 69' in height from the stone foundation to the center of the sheaves, 30' wide at the base, and 16' wide at the top. The engine house, boiler house, and machine and blacksmith shops were constructed with brick. All of the buildings and mine structures were designed and built under the supervision of Robert Ramsay, superintendent and engineer of the H. C. Frick Coke Company.

By 1888 the miners at the No. 2 mine were extracting between 52,000 and 56,000 tons of coal each month. Adjacent to the mine was a coke works containing 905 beehive coke ovens. There were 406 men working in the mine and 325 persons working in the coke yard. Overall, the Standard mine and coke works employed 936 men and boys. Both the Baltimore and Ohio and the Southwest Pennsylvania Railroad served Standard Shaft No. 2. Typical annual production from the late 1880s to 1900 was between 400,000 and 550,000 tons of coal, and the large coke works produced from 300,000 to 400,000 tons of coke. No other single Frick mine and coke

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works surpassed these production figures. The Frick Company widely publicized its Standard Shaft No. 2 and built a huge model of this operation which was exhibited at Chicago's Columbian Exposition in 1893.

By 1900 the H. C. Frick Coke Company had reassigned a number of its managers to new positions. O. W. Kennedy was appointed general superintendent in place of Thomas Lynch who remained the company's president. And James S. Mack of Mount Pleasant replaced Robert Ramsay as superintendent of the Standard Shaft and Slope mines. (Robert Ramsay later assumed the position of superintendent of the Frick Coke Company's United and Calumet mines.) Standard Shaft No. 2 and its coke works continued to employ about 900 men and boys and remained the company's largest single producer of coal and coke. In 1901 the H. C. Frick Coke Company was again reorganized following its acquisition by the newly formed United States Steel Corporation. James Mack remained as superintendent of the Standard works and oversaw the sinking of a third shaft north of Standard Shaft. Called Standard Shaft No. 3, this entry contained a head frame and windings but was used primarily to remove slate and other refuse from the underground workings.

During the 1910s Standard Shaft No. 2 produced its largest amounts of coal. Its greatest year, 1918, saw nearly 790,000 tons of coal removed from the mine. Five steam locomotives on the surface and a few dozen mules underground were used in hauling coal. Standard Shaft had seventeen boilers, totaling 2,915 horsepower, three air compressors, and ten pumps. Among the mine's features was an underground mule stable illuminated with electric lights.

As with the other Frick mines and coke works, production slumped during the brief depression of 1920-21 and as a result of the bituminous coal strike in 1922. However, by the mid 1920s the mine was again producing large amounts of coal. In 1925 Standard Shaft produced nearly 630,000 tons of coal and the coke works, with 799 beehive ovens in operation, produced over 253,000 tons of coke. The mine and coke works employed 558 persons. Standard Shaft produced more than 500,000 tons of coal in 1930, but the following year the H. C. Frick Coke Company permanently closed the mine and coke works. In recent years a reclamation project has recovered coal from the boney pile near the site of Standard Shaft No. 2. Only one building, the former Machine Shop, dates from the original opening of what was once among the largest mine and coke works in the United States.

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